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THE WOMAN OF CORINTH

HERMANN HAGEDORN

THE WOMAN OF CORINTH

M. V. E. Kuiass

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Hagedorn

THE WOMAN OF CORINTH

THE WOMAN OF CORINTH

A Tale in Verse by
Hermann Hagedorn

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TO

ALFRED VON MAUNTZ

IN REMEMBRANCE OF WALKS AND TALKS IN
FRIEDRICHRODA AND CHARLOTTENBURG
THIS TALE IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

CONTENTS

CANTO FIRST	PAGE 1
CANTO SECOND	15
CANTO THIRD	27
CANTO FOURTH	43

CANTO I

CANTO I

UP and down, up and down,
Walks my lord by Corinth town,

By the outer wall where grows
Almond tree and April rose;

Ponders while the day grows dim
O'er the hill-tops' golden rim,

Ponders, with a brow of wrath,
Siege of towns and battle path—

While his mantle, jewelled, white,
Glimmers in the gray twilight.

Up and down, up and down,
Walks my lord by Corinth town.

In her garden by the river
Where the sounds of Corinth town
Die beneath the bird-note's quiver,
Walks my lady up and down.

Oh, her hair is dark as fortune,
Bright as fortune are her eyes,
And her red, red lips importune
Love and death and sacrifice.

Slow and languid are her motions.
Over every rose she bends,
Drinking in the magic potions
That each dawn-blown petal sends.

Low she murmurs: "Winds, be round
him!
Stars, protect him with your fire!
Heart's beloved! I have found him,
I have found my heart's desire!"

See, beside the pool she lingers,
Singing through the evening air—

With the ivory of her fingers
In the ebon of her hair.

Up and down, up and down,
Walks my lord by Corinth town.

This the song my lady sings—
Dusky song on silver wings:

Come to my garden, lover, my lover,
Gray is the twilight and purple the bower,
Crickets are chirping and nightingales
hover,
Lover, my lover,
In thicket and flower.

Lone am I, lone, and the twilight mists
chill me,
Chill is the heart of me, loveless am I!
Come to me, live with me, love me and kill
me!
So, oh my lover,
I'll love ere I die.

Up and down, up and down,
Walks my lord by Corinth town.

And his mantle, jewelled, white,
Trembles in the pale starlight.

Stops my lord and stands to hear,
Rapt with heart and senses all,
While the notes a-quivering fall
Luring, luring on his ear.
Brighter grows his cheek, his breast
Heaves with pain, the tenderest
That e'er tore the human heart:
Anguish, when the dead dreams start
Throbbing from the dust and soar
High to life and hope once more.
On the air the low song dies.
Turns my lord with burning eyes,
Burning blood and heart elate,
Panting, to the garden's gate.

See, my lady's slender form
Quivers as the leaf in storm.

"'T is a jest of winds that mock!"
Nay, my lady, 't is his knock.
See, her eyes are wild and strange;
Through the garden's depths they
range.
"Comes the lover, comes so late,
Knocking at my garden-gate?
'T is a dream and sense is drowsing,"
Sighs my lady, "'t is a dream."
O'er the garden droops the night.
One by one, as jewels bright,
In the pool the pale stars gleam.
Quoth my lady, "'T is a dream.
Happy dream for senses drowsing
And for weary hearts that wait."
Hark! The eager knock arousing
Clear upon her garden-gate.

Starts my lady, and her eyes
Stare with hope and dread afar,
Through the shadowy gate afar
To a dream-born paradise.
Droops her dark hair as the night

O'er her shoulders, droop her lids
On her eyes' too feverish light.
Doth the dark give clearer sight
To the spirit in its plight?
See! My lady, daring fate,
Gazes at the portal straight
Where the eager knocking bids
Entrance to her garden gate.
"Who is he that comes so late?"
Quoth my lady, clear and low;
"Is he friend or is he foe?"
And my lord gave answer bold:
"Prince of God on earth is he!"

High my lady held her head
And a silver laugh laughed she:
"Foolish, foolish Danaë,
Lured by Jupiter and sped
To her shame in web of gold—
Jupiter who lies in wait
At a garden's postern gate!"
Answer came not, nor the sigh
Of a leaf disturbed the air

Silent, save the melody
Of maiden's hands in maiden's hair
Passing and repassing there.

Up and down, up and down,
Walked my lord by Corinth town.

Knocked again he at the gate.
Strongly with a hand of power
Beat he at my lady's bower,
Beat as one who will not wait.
"Who is he that comes so late
Beating as a trooper beats
At an inn at dead of night?"
Came the answer clear and light:
"Lord of armies and of fleets,
King is he and lord of war,
Turkish prince and Emperor!"

Tears unto my lady's eyes
Rose and choked the scoffing laugh:
"Shall my yielded heart be prize
To a conquering army's chaff?
Nay, and though thine be the face

That my dreams bewildered trace,
Searching, searching but to see
Dwindling in infinity.
Nay, the conqueror too late
Knocks upon my garden gate."
Thus she whispered to the rose
Pressed against her bosom close—
Happy, happy rose to die
'Twixt a maiden's laugh and sigh!

Back my lady threw her head
Clouded in her stormy hair:
"Shall I lay my bosom bare
For your steel?" my lady said.
"Ye have drunk my people's blood,
Set my people to the sword;
Force the slender bar of wood—
'T is a fragile gate, my lord!"

Up and down, up and down,
Walked my lord by Corinth town.

And a third time at the gate
Knocked my lord with throbbing heart,

Quivering as a soul apart
From the petty things and great
Closing round the man of state,
Round the haughty lord of war,
Prince of God and Emperor.
And his knock was lingering, low.
See'st thou not my lady start,
Trembling in the pale star-beams?
Sigh her lips in joyous woe,
Droop her eyelids, tender, slow—
Hark! the lingering knock once more,
Like a poet at the door
Of the princess of his dreams.
"Not a lord with sword and drums
'T is that knocks so soft, so late,
At my bower's postern gate—
'T is a lover now that comes."
And beneath the pale starlight
Glides my lady, glimmering white,
Like a vapor in the night.
To the postern gate she flies,
Draws the pond'rous bolt and thrice
Turns the rusty, creaking lock.

Hark! Once more the tender knock,
Joyous as her own heart's pain.
Then adown the paths again
Speeds my lady like the wind,
With the open gate behind;
And behind, with mien sedate,
White and as a cedar straight,
Young Mohammed, cruel, kind,
Strong of heart and pure of mind,
Bolting fast the garden-gate.
"Who is he that comes so late?"
Quivering speaks my lady dear,
Turning in her fear and flight.
Comes the answer to her ear,
Comes the answer, low and clear,
"'T is a lover in the night."

In the garden droops the rose
'Neath the dewy pearls of sleep;
Blossoms drowse and petals close.
In the garden droops the rose,
But the scarlet bloom that glows
On my lady's bosom white

Bows her dark head not in sleep.
In the garden droops the rose.
Hark ! the sudden sob, the cry,
Frightened sob and fond reply,
Muffled word and answer light—
"Lover, lover, in the night."

CANTO II

CANTO II

WALKS the sentry up and down,
By the walls of Corinth town;

Walks, and overhead, his spear
Sparkles as a jewel clear

In the light that breaks athwart
Stormy autumn clouds that part.

Up and down, up and down,
By the walls of Corinth town.

And at every turn his gaze
Leaps into the eastern haze,

Leaps unto the treasured East
As a glutton to his feast.

And with wrath and bitter fret,
Curse he breathes and muttered threat;

Toward a garden, bleak and sere,
Brandishing his burnished spear.

Walks the sentry up and down,
Up and down by Corinth town.

Silence lies upon the plain,
O'er the low hills silence lies,
Calm, before the wind and rain,
Winter's tempest, winter's pain,
That must come when summer dies.
Summer's limbs are old and weak,
Gone the glamour from her cheek,
Gone the starlight from her eyes.
Comes the winter, cold and bleak.
Lady, lady, doth the rose
Droop upon your warm, warm breast?
See! Across the cloudy west
Comes the winter with his snows.
Nay, my lady, dry the tear!

Though you love or though you fear,
In the twilight of the year
Comes the winter, soon or late,
Knocking at your garden gate.

On the mountain droops the cloud,
O'er the lowlands storms the sea,
In the west the misty crowd,
Wind-elves weaving summer's shroud,
Lifts its stormy pageantry.
O'er the roofs of Corinth town
Black the wintry heavens frown;
Frown the swarthy Orient faces
Of the warriors as they go,
Proud and stormy-browed and slow—
Scornful lips and listless paces—
Whispering through the open places.
And in lampless streets by night,
When the angry tongues are loose,
Cries the hunger for the fight,
Cries the wrath at idle truce
From the raging hearts of men.
Cries in banquet-hall and den,

Where the reeking wicks flare wild;
And the drunken and defiled
Bid their harlots bear the name
That my lord at midnight hour
Whispers at my lady's bower,
Whispers with no thought of shame.

Sunk in rapture, drowned in song,
Drunk with wine of red desire,
Lives my lord the whole day long,
Lulled with note of lute and lyre,
Cooled with winds that kissed the rose,
Warmed with passion that is fire.

Grows the flame as languor grows.
Builds my lord his own soul's pyre;
Dies with poison of a song,
Dies and dies and never knows.

And my lady sings and sings—
Dusky song on silver wings;
Sings of love and sings of war,
Maiden, slave and conqueror,

While the flames leap redder, higher,
Round her lover's funeral pyre.

Walks the sentry up and down
By the walls of Corinth town.

Lo, what star gleams on the plain
Flashing through the mists afar?
See! the sparkling flash again,
And to left, a brother star—
Two and three, like flitting lights
Rising, falling, gleaming, dying,
Here and there, like glow-worms flying
Through the heat of summer nights.
O'er the sun the dark clouds roll.
Walks the sentry, moodily,
Up and down the lone patrol.
"'T was a sunbeam's jest," quoth he.

By the Prophet's beard, a jest!
See you not the shadowy horde
Moving in a vast unrest
By the snaky river's ford?

Like a snake itself it coils,
Undulating, slow and certain,
Hidden, where the dust's gray curtain
High round man and charger boils.
Doth the serpent leap to sting?
Nay, the coil resolves once more,
Winding where the dwarf-pines cling
To the stream's precipitous shore.
Now the first steed parts the tide,
Tests the river's perilous way.
Safe the ford! The dark lines sway
Forward through the dashing spray.
Serpent, serpent! See it glide
To the river's farther side,
Turn and coil and mutely bide!

On the walls of Corinth town
Stops the sentry, and a frown
Gathers on his sallow brow.
"'Tis a steed!" he cries, "A steed!
Abou, brother, see'st it thou?"
Abou laughs. "A cloud of dust!
Languor makes your eyes distrust.

Give the siroc's whims no heed.
'T is a goat-drove in stampede."
"Abou, do the horns of goats
Gleam in sunlight as a spear?"
"Bah! Who speaks of weapons here?
Swords are rusty, spears are bent,
While my lord Mohammed dotes
Soft in gardens of content."
"Abou, Abou, look once more!
By the river's rising shore
Where the dusty air grows clear."
Abou cries, "The foe, the foe!
See the first outriders go!
Beat to arms! My lord must know!
'T is the Greek in full career!"

'T is the Greek! A mighty shout
From the ramparts thunders out,
Till the swaying ships that ride
On Lepanto's foam-flecked tide
Fling it faintly back: "The Greek!"
And from every mountain-peak
From Cithæron, dim and bleak,

Multitudinously strong
Runs the cry the winds along;
Echoing madly up and down
In the streets of Corinth town.
Sound the alarum, beat your drums!
'T is the foe, the foe who comes!
Yet from Corinth's end to end
Where her Greeks in bondage bend
Breathes the murmur: "'T is the friend."

Soldan, Soldan, where art thou?
See, thy runners, hot and fleet
Racing down the crowded street,
Through the noisy rabble plough.
Do they know the hidden gate?
Swift of foot, the couriers run.
Speed ye! Speed! The chieftains wait!
Speed! In gardens passionate
Ye shall find the laggard one.

Gardens, gardens! By the river
Blooms the rose as once it bloomed?

Nay, the budless branches shiver.
Herb and petal—all are doomed.

Late October winds are crying
With the dead leaves in their arms;
And the summer's hopes are dying
In the clutch of autumn storms.

Lady, lady, ah, the summer!
Was it all too brief and sweet?
Hark! A boisterous newcomer
Whirls adown the windy street.

Not as once 't is love a-knocking
Soft—upon your garden gate.
Hear the laughter, shrill and mocking!
'T is the laugh of bitter Fate.

From the stream's ford, whirling down
Sweeps the foe on Corinth town.

CANTO III

CANTO III

THROUGH the chamber, dark and
mute,
Softly sounds my lady's lute;

And far softer—as the sigh
Of the hills when echoes die

Lulled in dark groves far away—
Sings my lady all the day.

Not of war and death she sings,
Not of dark tempestuous things;

Not of conquest, not of pride,
Not of captive kings who ride

Caged as Bajazet in train
Of insatiate Tamburlaine—

Nay, of placid hours of peace
Sings my lady without cease.

"Let the proud world rise or fall!
Stay thy conquest—Love is all.

"Love that heals where strife has harmed,
Conquering, conquering, titan-armed!"

And my lord, her king and thrall,
Echoes softly, "Love is all."

Lady, lady, what has crept
Thus into your stormy heart
That the warlike dreams depart
Fleeing from the heights they kept?
Hath a purer love stolen in,
Love to godliness akin,
Stronger than the fires that swept
Soul and body into sin?

Surely, in those softened eyes
More than brute desire there lies,
More than passion's aching call
In that murmur: Love is all.

And my lord speaks low: "My queen,
All that conquered lands may hold,
All of glory, all of gold,
Lies here in thy small demesne.
Not a crown can lure me now,
Not a triumph stir my pride,
As thy white hands on my brow,
As thy loved face at my side."

Quoth my lady, "Leave thy strife,
Leave thy futile, conquering broils!
Here awaits a fuller life—
Love and peace give nobler toils.
Power and fame—ah, love, they fade!
Sickened eye and blood-red blade,
Sleepers waking ne'er again!
What cries loudest—joy or pain
O'er the hard-won battle-plain?"

But my lord spake ne'er a word.
Only pressed her close, so close,
That the summer's last red rose
Ere they crushed it, must have heard,
Musically soft and sweet,
Heart to heart re-echoing beat.

"Lord, my lord!" A runner cries
Loudly at the chamber door.
See! The rose sinks to the floor,
All-dispetalled, sinks and dies.
"Lord, my lord, the foe is near,
Terrible with blade and spear,
Hear it, chieftain, hear it, hear!"

Ah, my lady's pale, pale cheek,
Shot with dread, grows whiter still.
Silently the dark eyes fill,
Moan the pale lips: "'T is the Greek."
Slow the fair, limp arms descend:
"Love, my love, is this the end?"

But my lord clasps close her form,

Clasps about his neck her hands,
Till the fear-chilled lips grow warm
And the fear-shrunk breast expands.
"Nay, my sweet, 't is not the end.
Is there force on earth can rend
Heart from heart and friend from friend?
Thou art Corinth's. 'T is enough.
Thou hast waked a nobler flame
In this bosom harsh and rough
Than desire for conqueror's fame.
Give me Corinth! Let the Greek
Have the whole wide world beside.
In thy love is all I seek,
In thine eyes, that voiceless speak,
Lives a god none e'er denied.
Conquest! 'T was for thee I yearned!
Empire! 'T was thy kingly soul!
Fame! 'T was but the light that burned
Round thee like an aureole.
Noble heart, since thou dost live,
Strife for me and war must die.
With the deep love that I give
Ne'er shall wrath or hatred vie.

Let the vain world fight and brawl.
We know well that love is all."

Droops my lady on his breast,
All-relaxing, faint with joy;
Drinking thirstily life's best —
Love that is without alloy.

But above, the dark skies frown,
Thundering over Corinth town.

"Lord, my lord!" A louder knock
Than the runner's humble beat
Shakes the portal's ancient lock.
Hot with anger to his feet
Leaps my lord with flashing eyes.
"By my faith, he is not wise
Who presumes to trespass here!"
Comes the answer stern and clear:
"Check thy wrathful speech and hear!
'Tis Halil, thy Grand Vizier."

Silence—doom-filled as the path
Lesser winds leave smooth and dead

Ere the sea-king comes in wrath—
O'er the chamber, brooding, spread.
Huddled on her couch in dread
Lay my lady, staring mute,
Feverishly resolute,
Through the chamber's dumb distress
Wide-eyed into nothingness.
And my lord with stormy face
Scanned the door a second's space;
Spoke. His voice was sharp as steel.
"Good!" quoth he. "For woe or weal,
Thou shalt enter here, Halil!"

As a wizard waves his wand,
Mute, my lord with sweep of hand
Speaks his bidding. Like a cloud,
Windsped through the skies by night,
White of robe and pallid browed,
To the alcove's dim half-light
That the low-drooped curtains shroud,
Glides my lady from his sight.
Stands Mohammed sunk in thought
Unmoved in the chamber still,

In my lady's spite, the thrill
Of old battles, newly fought,
Leaping in his blood like fire;
Leaping—with the old desire
Pounding every pledge to nought.
Comes a low voice in appeal
Where the shadows deep conceal:
"Sweet my lover, comes Halil?"
From my lord the tempters flee.
"Hush, my heart, he comes," quoth he.

See, the bolts are flung aside!
Now the massive door swings wide.
On the threshold, mute and calm,
White with years that went too fleet,
Lies Halil, in deep salaam
Fallen at his Emperor's feet.
"Rise!" Mohammed speaks, "Arise!
Sink not so those curious eyes.
Know I not my chieftain's spies?
Mark the chamber's fittings well.
Thus and thus thy lips shall tell
Lives he with his infidel."

But Halil in cunning bred
Lifts not up his hoary head,
Kisses thrice the threshold stone.
"Great is Allah, great alone
Is Mohammed among men!"
"Leave thine idle mumbling then!
Greatness scorns it," quoth my lord.
"Speak the beggar's news ye hoard.
Speak and go. I wait thy word."
And Halil with face serene
Slowly rises, in his mien
Reverence for his monarch, blent
With a councillor's self-content.
"Kind is Allah!" quoth he. "Kind
Is Mohammed to deny
Not the portal of his mind
To so poor a soul as I!"

Thrice unto the marble floor
Bows the councillor as before.

"By my faith!" Mohammed cries,
"Must I waste life's fleeting span

With God's pretext of a man
Stuffed with vulgar flatteries?
Give thy news! By God, I too
Have a message thou shalt bear
That shall make each separate hair
Rise and pierce thy turban through!
Come, what speaks my Grand Vizier?"
Cries Halil with sudden ire
Stirring tongue and eyes to fire:
"Lord Mohammed, thou shalt hear!
Though thy wrath shall strike me dead,
Hear it! Thou hast forfeited
Love and honor, dost thou mark?
Quenched is ardor's golden spark
In thy soldiery; thy chiefs
Dumbly nurse their waxing griefs,
Lolling through the long lame days
While my lord the lover plays!
Hear me! I shall speak and die
If my time for death has come.
Life grows pale and wearisome
Here where hopes a-rotting lie.
Hot on Corinth sweeps the Greek!

Dost thou hear it, and still bide
Like a dandy, fond and weak,
At a faithless harlot's side?
By my head, I scorn thee, lord!"
"Then thy head shall pay the price!"
Cries Mohammed. In a trice
From its scabbard leaps his sword,
Leaps and flashes high in air—
But not on Halil's white hair
Falls the blade. A cry so low
Scarce the listening ear would dare
Deem 'twas human, checked the blow.

Quoth Halil, "I thank her grace."
But my lord with wrathful face
Thrusts in sheath his crescent sword,
Speaks: "Thy thanks are well deferred,
'Twas the wind's low moan ye heard."

Quoth Halil: "Since I shall live
By the wind's good grace, O King,
Hear the message that I give,
Hear the challenge that I fling!

At the dusking hour to-night
In thy hall a council waits.
Ere the Greek be at our gates
Thou shalt answer and requite!"
Lifts my lord his princely face.
Of his anger lives no trace;
Only round his lips a smile
Faintly mocks the councillor's guile.
"Let the rebel plot proceed!
'T is a pretty game, indeed.
And the penalty?" he saith.
Quoth Halil with faltering breath,
"For the woman—it is death."

Silence like an icy spell
O'er the chamber's inmates fell.
Not a voice, no wind's low moan,
Ne'er a sound—save one alone,
Where in deep recess apart
Pounds my lady's breaking heart.

Quoth my lord with voice too calm
Quite to hide the bitter grudge,

"Let my noble chieftains judge!
Faith, 't will give them little balm."
Hot the old wrath o'er him sweeps,
Maddened on Halil he leaps.
"Go, before I strike thee dumb!
Call together all the scum!
By the Prophet's soul, I come!"

From the curtained shadows nigh
Comes a single, piercing cry.

CANTO IV

CANTO IV

OVER Corinth, far and wide,
Swift, Night's cloudy raiders ride,

Stealing from the spire its gem,
From the dome its diadem;

Hiding in their mantle cold,
Silver, copper, bronze and gold.

See, Earth's glowing colors die!
Pallid brow and starry eye,

Rank and fortune, blood and fame
One are with the beggar's shame.

And the shadowy form that slips
Down the street with panting lips,

Heart and senses in a whirl,
May be queen or peasant girl.

Darker, deeper, drooping down
Sinks the night on Corinth town.

Lo, the castle halls are bright!
Who would say the Greek is near?
Let the chieftains curse and jeer!
Here is merriment and cheer,
Here from lamp and chandelier
Flame a hundred crowns of light.
Through the portals, dark and dumb,
See, the sullen chieftains come.
War lies cowering on their lips,
War burns in the old hot scars,
War laughs on the scimitars
Glimmering fiery at their hips.
War is close! With hungry stare
Speeds he through the frightened
air;
Through the windows, on the walls
Where the lamplight, flickering, falls;

In thy very love's embrace
Peers his scarlet, venomous face.

Ah, Mohammed, dost thou too
Mark him at thy sabre-side
As thou mov'st with heavy stride
Swift my lady's garden through?
He is there and there and there!
Hear his laughter on the air!
In the dead leaves hear his cry,
"Yield thy glory, yield and die!"
And above, the answering shriek
Torn from topmost boughs: "The
Greek!"

From the garden, chill with fright,
Gazing not to left nor right
Strides Mohammed through the night.

Hark! The foe at Corinth's gate!
Hear his hoofs that beat the plain!
But within like hounds that strain
Impotent, the chieftains wait.

Will my lord be laggard still?
From far chambers, low and sweet,
Hark! A cithern's playful trill
And the throb of naked feet.
Dumb the chieftains stand, the hall
Caught as in a wizard's thrall
Sinks to sudden stony sleep.
Only up the gilded wall
Still the flickering shadows creep.

Bursts a rout of slender forms
From the portal, sweeping gay
Through the council's dark array
As the sun through summer storms.
Through the chieftains' ranks they bound,
Close the angry captains round,
Mocking curse and wrathful glance
In the wild bacchantine dance.
Hear the laughter, hear the glee—
Flying hair and lifted knee—
"Joy and merriment shall be!
'T is the Emperor's decree!"

Onward still the wild rout sways.
And from unseen doors, swung wide,
Feast and raiment to provide
See, the shiny Nubians glide,
Bearing high their golden trays.

But Halil, the Grand Vizier,
Sweeps his crescent sabre clear,
Cries aloud, "A mockery!"
And the wrath of hidden smarts,
Burning in a hundred hearts
In a single roar bursts free:
"Mockery, a mockery!
Kill Mohammed!"

In the hall
Flaming riot rages wild,
Where the chiefs, too long beguiled,
Vent their anger's seething gall.
Feast and trencher clattering fall.
See, the yelling Nubians fly;
And the dancers madly flushed

195145B

To the portals leap, or crushed
Silent on the pavement lie.
"To Mohammed!" Hear the cry!
Through the great hall like a scourge,
Rancorous the chieftains surge.
"To Mohammed!" hear them urge.
"To Mohammed! He shall die!"

Lo, the wild hound in his sweep
Crouches, yet withholds the leap.
In the portal, pale of mien
'Neath the lamps' rhapsodic sheen,
Stands Mohammed. In his eyes
Not a gleam of anger lies,
Not resentment's sullen flame;
Deaf to vengeance as to blame
Stands my lord, imperial souled—
Solitary, huge and cold.

See, the chieftains falter, sway.
Speaks Mohammed clear: "Ha' done!
Bear the lifeless girls away!
Let the marriage-feast go on!"

But from angered throats once more
Wells the loud, impassioned roar.

"By my faith!" Mohammed cries,
"Are ye infidels to brawl,
Brave and with the winecup wise
Here in mine own banquet-hall?
Let the Greek turn home his way!
Half my Empire will I pay
Here and in Arabian lands
For the spot where Corinth stands!
Sound the tambour for the truce!"
But like torrents through the sluice
Once again the wrath breaks loose.
"By my soul, ye still defy?"
Turns my lord with wrathful eye,
Sweeps the portal's curtain high—
In the passage—lo! a form
Crouches from the furious storm.

Sobs my lady, "Must it be?"
But Mohammed, gentle, kind,
Draws her to him, and behind

Like a dark portcullis, see!
Whirring falls the tapestry.

Veiled and white my lady stands.
Lady, lady, 'tis the test!
How the flushed cheeks blench, the hands
Quiver on the heaving breast.
Hear the laugh, the bitter jest!
But my lady, brave and pale,
Draws with hands that never quail
Slowly from her face the veil.

Ah, my lady, thou art fair!
Lo, the softness of thy gaze,
Lo, the shadows of thy hair
Kindle in the lamp's wild rays!
How the opals leap to fire,
In the rubies throbs thy blood!
From the shadows high and higher,
Fierce as demons of desire,
Raging flames the glistering flood.

And the cries, the laughter cease.
In the great wide hall is peace.

Soft a murmur, first a breath
Like the wind that hasteneth
Through still tree-tops, waking
stirs.
Hark! The sullen crowd demurs!
And my lady, tremulous, white,
Clasps her lover's hand in fright,
Clasps his hand and holds it tight.

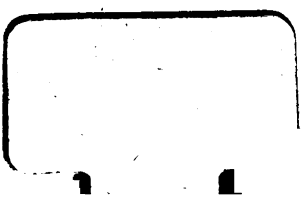
And the low deep murmur grows,
Rising faster and more fast,
Like the tempest wind that blows
O'er the sea-reach wild and vast,
Till in more than mortal throes
Cloud and billow meet at last
In a heaven-rocking blast.
Rings the great hall with the cry!
But not now, not now the chiefs
Thunder, with unfettered griefs,
Nay, not now, the shouts defy!
Like a beggar in the street
Prostrate at my lady's feet,
Lo, the mighty chieftains lie.

Triumph for a second's space
Lights my lady's flame-ringed face.
But upon Mohammed's brow
Shines no pride of victory now,
Only measureless disgust.
Let the chiefs in worship bow!
Great Mohammed's soul is just.
Well he knows the bitter thrust:
'T is his own soul in the dust.

On my lady's ebon hair
Soft he lays his hand, and swift
As a loved gift for a gift
Gleaming eyes her answer bear.
Doth he sob? Within him, high,
Wild, unchecked the mad blood flows.
In that flashing glance he knows
That his love can never die!

From his belt the curved blade leaps.
Is there none to warn or check?
Hot the white steel downward sweeps,
Downward on her gleaming neck.

On the floor the lovely head
Lies—dissevered—bleeding—dead.

Cries Mohammed, quivering, white:
"Bear the woman from my sight.
To the Greek! He falls to-night!"

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